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Coordination of policy and programming frameworks for more effective development cooperation

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Coordination of policy and programming frameworks for more effective development cooperation" (JIU/REP/96/3).

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ANNEX

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COORDINATION OF POLICY AND PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORKS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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Geneva
1996

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ACRONYMS

ACC	Administrative Committee on Co-ordination
CCAQ	Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions
CCPOQ	Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions
CSN	Country Strategy Note
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JCGP	Joint Consultative Group on Policy
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
LDC	Least Developed Country
NaTCAP	National Technical Cooperation Assessment and Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PFP	Policy Framework Paper
RTC	Round Table Conference
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Genuine coordination among development partners, including especially the host countries, the United Nations system and the multilateral financial institutions as well as bilateral donors, has become a high priority objective on the international agenda. It is now generally agreed that the attainment of that objective would enhance the contribution of development cooperation to economic and social advancement, and make it more efficient and cost-effective in the light in particular of current global financial constraints.

Accordingly, General Assembly resolutions 45/264, 46/235, 48/162 and 50/227 on the restructuring and revitalisation of the economic, social and related sectors of the United Nations system give pride of place to policy and programme coordination issues, while Assembly resolutions 44/211, 47/199, and 50/120 on triennial policy reviews of operational activities for development of the United Nations system provide specific directives to the system organizations on coordinated programme development and implementation in the field.

The multiplicity of policy and programming frameworks employed by external development partners illustrate the challenge of coordination. Chapter II provides an overview of the problem. It analyses the cost and workload implications for the host Governments and cooperating partners of the plethora of development frameworks which create serious aid coordination bottlenecks in the developing countries.

Chapter III highlights the coordination responsibilities and capacities of host Governments, as well as the development aid policies and practices of major bilateral donor Governments which bear on development coordination at field and headquarters levels.

Chapter IV concentrates on the United Nations system. It reviews the main coordination mechanisms employed at the country level to foster integrated programme development and implementation. The resident coordinator system, the country strategy note and the programme approach, which are inter-related, have been identified as the most appropriate means to achieving the integration of all external inputs with national development processes. This chapter also examines regional coordination arrangements and identifies regional economic cooperation and integration groupings in the developing regions as useful mechanisms for coordinating the organizations' inter-country development frameworks.

Chapter V focuses on the United Nations intergovernmental system, whose fragmentary nature is mostly responsible for the numerous frameworks and coordination problems within the multilateral development system. The revitalized coordination mandate of the relevant intergovernmental bodies, in particular of the

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Economic and Social Council under the United Nations Charter, could enhance system-wide coordination and oversight in the conduct of international development cooperation. On the basis of the above, the Inspector offers the following main recommendations while drawing attention to other recommendations contained in the body of this report.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Country Strategy Note (CSN) (paragraphs 56-67)

(a) Host Governments should, with the assistance of resident coordinators as needed, ensure that the CSN process is used effectively and consistently by all external development partners for the integrated programming and implementation of their inputs in conformity with the programme approach guidelines;

(b) The CSN framework should be encouraged in all countries with significant involvement of the United Nations system and other major donors, and it should replace or subsume other multisectoral programming frameworks at the country level in order to reduce the cost, frequency and workloads entailed in overlapping country programming exercises; more specific sectoral programmes may be prepared on the basis of the CSN;

(c) Subject to (a) and (b) above, countries with significant structural adjustment programmes financed by the multilateral financial institutions in the context of their policy framework papers (PFP), may either dispense with the CSN or design it to support the efficient implementation of such programmes to enhance the prospects of their success and impact. In that event, the CSN could have the same time frame as the PFP;

(d) The resident coordinators should fully implement relevant CCPOQ guidelines regarding agencies without country representation by ensuring their technical contributions to the CSN process;

(e) ACC should update the policy and operational parameters for the preparation, design and implementation of the CSN, incorporating, as appropriate, the observations and new elements outlined in paragraph 67 herein.

(f) The development cooperation report prepared by the resident coordinators could be used to monitor and report on annual progress in the implementation of the CSN where applicable.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Periodic evaluation of policy and programming frameworks (paragraphs 11-22)

Each organization should periodically evaluate its technical assistance policy and programming framework(s) to establish their cost-benefits for the host countries and for the organizations themselves, as well as their consistency with the CSN process, programme approach, and resource mobilization potential.

RECOMMENDATION 3: System-wide standard formats for development cooperation (paragraph 67)

(a) Recognizing the limited implementation to date of existing General Assembly directives in this area, ACC should intensify its efforts to achieve system-wide standard formats for field data collection, situation analysis or development needs assessments, reporting cycles, evaluation and accountability requirements in order to facilitate joint programming and implementation in furtherance of the programme approach and the CSN process;

(b) Considering the very general character of existing CCPOQ guidelines on the resident coordinator system, ACC should formulate and agree upon a standard set of more specific and binding administrative instructions to be issued by each executive head to his/her field representatives requiring their active and consistent support for the resident coordinator system, as an integral part of their job descriptions.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Inter-agency development information facility (databank) in the resident coordinator's office (paragraphs 54-55)

In the perspective of recommendation 3 above, and in order to integrate efficiently the existing separate information systems of the organizations at the country level, an inter-agency development information facility (data bank) for each developing country should be established in the resident coordinator's office using a part of the resources earmarked by the UNDP Executive Board for strengthening the resident coordinator system. The proposed information facility (data bank) should be fed and maintained by all the organizations in their respective areas of competence, and should be accessible, through electronic media, especially the Internet where possible, to the international development community, locally and externally.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Field-level coordination committees (paragraphs 48-51)

In addition to the meetings of all external development partners, country-level coordination committees, sectoral subcommittees and thematic working groups and task forces should be used more systematically, with the necessary technical inputs of headquarters, regional and/or subregional offices, as mechanisms for policy dialogue and for the integrated development of country and sectoral programmes.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Regional and subregional coordination (paragraphs 68-75)

(a) Cooperation between the regional commissions and other organizations of the system should continue to include the mutual review of draft regional strategies and programmes of cooperation;

(b) In order to enhance the national ownership of intercountry programmes, the organizations should establish strong linkages between country and intercountry programmes inter alia by supporting institutional networks within each economic cooperation grouping in the different regions, and by promoting the implementation of the decisions of such groupings at the country level in the context of the CSN and country programming processes;

(c) All the organizations should endeavour to harmonize their regional programme cycles in consultation and coordination with the regional commissions.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Role of the Economic and Social Council (paragraphs 76-83)

(a) The Economic and Social Council should further strengthen its coordination and oversight functions under the Charter, by exploring, as a first step, the practical feasibility of instituting/expanding joint sessions, together with a common agenda, of the Executive Boards of United Nations programmes and funds for the consideration of specific coordination issues including, inter alia, CSNs and country programmes, and the specialized agencies may be invited to participate in such sessions as they may deem appropriate;

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(b) The next step could be the creation of a unified or single Executive Board as a committee of the Council while preserving the identities and mandates of the programmes and funds concerned;

(c) In connection with (a) and (b) above, the Council may request the relevant United Nations programmes and funds to intensify efforts to achieve a standard format for the formulation and presentation of their development cooperation programmes and related budgets, in order to strengthen cross-organizational linkages and coherence;

(d) Furthermore, the Council should assign priority to seeking system-wide conformity with General Assembly resolutions relating to coordination issues in the economic, social and related sectors through specific recommendations thereon to the governing bodies of the specialized agencies.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The main purpose of this report is to contribute to on-going efforts by the Member States to rationalize the operations of the complex network of multilateral development cooperation institutions in order to ensure optimum efficiency, integrated approaches, and lower overhead costs in their support of the developing countries. The report is based on the premise that one way of achieving that objective is to integrate or harmonize to the extent possible the numerous policy and programming frameworks[1] used by international development partners to formulate, implement and evaluate their development assistance policies, strategies, programmes and projects at various geographical levels of intervention.

2. Efficiency concerns have increasingly become prominent on the agendas of the central intergovernmental organs against the backdrop of the contracting volume of official development assistance and the severe financial crisis prevailing throughout the United Nations system. These circumstances have reinforced the need for systematic coordination of the organizations' development policies and programmes and the integrated channelling of their catalytic resources towards the high priority needs of the recipient countries.

3. Successive General Assembly resolutions on operational activities for development have consistently reaffirmed the principle that, at the country level, the recipient Governments have primary responsibility for the coordination, design and management of external assistance, and that national plans and priorities should constitute the viable frame of reference for the national programming of operational activities for development within the United Nations system.

4. Subject to the above, the same General Assembly resolutions have also called upon organizations of the system to facilitate the coordination role of Governments through a rationalized and integrated response by all elements of the system to country-driven development priorities. For example, the Assembly:

(a) **Resolution 44/211 (1989)**

"calls for more integrated and coordinated programming of United Nations system cooperation, in which programming processes would be based on an overall national programme framework for operational activities for development to be prepared by the recipient Government..." (paragraph 17).

(b) **Resolution 47/199 (1992)**

"Stresses that, on the basis of the priorities and plans of recipient countries, and in order to ensure the effective integration of assistance provided by the United Nations system into the development process of countries(...), a country strategy note should be formulated by interested recipient Governments, with the assistance of and in cooperation with the United Nations system, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, in all recipient countries where the Government so chooses..." (paragraph 9);

"Calls upon resident coordinators to take the necessary steps, in those countries where the scale of the activities of the United Nations and the number of funds, programmes and specialized agencies so justify, to establish, in consultation with host Governments, an appropriate field-level committee, which will normally comprise all resident United Nations system representatives and which, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, will serve as a United Nations coordinating mechanism in the countries concerned" (paragraph 40).

(c) **Resolution 50/120 (1995)**

"Decides that, where in place, the country strategy note should be the common framework for country programmes of United Nations system organizations and for programming, monitoring, and evaluating United Nations system activities in such countries..." (paragraph 18);

"Requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States and United Nations organizations, to consider ways of enhancing the coordination of United Nations development activities at the regional and subregional levels, including ways of enhancing the role of the regional commissions and of promoting the national ownership of regional programmes" (paragraph 20);

5. The above excerpts are complemented in the same resolutions by other provisions having a bearing on various forms of inter-agency coordination, such as the adoption of a programme approach in the design, delivery, and evaluation of development assistance, the strengthening and utilization of national capacities, harmonization of programme and budget cycles, or simplification of operating rules and procedures. These injunctions seek to ensure more rational and integrated programming and allocation of resources in order to enable the host Governments to coordinate, internalize, manage, and evaluate all external inputs in the context of their national development strategies, plans and programmes.

6. The present report, which was partly prompted by a request from the Universal Postal Union, pursues the basic objective enunciated in paragraph 5 above. The report focuses mainly on the coordination of the organizations' development policy and programming frameworks. Other aspects of inter-agency coordination in the field, such as the structure of field representation, are covered more elaborately in another JIU report entitled "Strengthening the field representation of organizations within the United Nations system" due to be published in 1996. Also, this report does not include coordination arrangements in respect of humanitarian assistance which is more fully covered in two recent JIU reports.[2] References to host or recipient Governments and countries also include countries with economies in transition.

7. Furthermore, except where used to emphasize the formal coordination prerogative of host Governments assisted by resident coordinators, the term "coordination" is used in a collegial sense in this report to include various forms of harmonization, convergence, integration, or synchronization of actions by the different partners in the programming, execution, and evaluation of their development cooperation activities at the country, subregional, regional and international levels.

8. The Inspector equally subscribes to the definition of coordination in the Secretary-General's report entitled "An Agenda for Development"[3]: "Coordination means a clear allocation of responsibilities, and effective division of labour among the many actors involved in development, and a commitment by each of those actors to work towards common and compatible goals and objectives. Individual development actors must strive to make their efforts complementary and contributory, rather than isolated or competing. Coordination, so viewed, must guide the actions of each of these actors and the interactions among them"[4].

9. In preparing this report the Inspector has been guided, among other things, by the General Assembly resolutions cited under paragraph 4 above, and by some previous JIU reports[5] wholly or partly concerned with this subject, as well as by the ongoing deliberations on the United Nations reform. Other useful sources of information include the reports by the Secretary-General entitled "An Agenda for Development", his more recent report on "Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System"[6], and relevant resolutions relating to the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social, and related fields.[7]

10. Furthermore, the Inspector visited several developing countries to observe coordination processes in concrete operational contexts, and exchange views on the subject with host Government officials, United Nations system country teams including, among others, resident coordinators, and resident bilateral aid missions. The Inspector records his appreciation of the contribution of all those who assisted in various ways in the preparation of the present report.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

11. The Inspector's findings suggest that, pursuant to successive General Assembly resolutions on operational activities for development referred to above, the United Nations system has made some progress in the elaboration of coordination concepts and tools at the country level. For example, United Nations system coordination committees, usually chaired by the resident coordinators, have been established in many countries even if their effectiveness differs among countries. The concept of a programme approach is likewise gaining ground although its practical application for operational coordination purposes is still not commonplace. There are also increasing examples of field-level cooperation and coordination between the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions. At the global level, the United Nations funds and programmes within the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) and the specialized agencies have contributed to refine various coordination concepts and tools in support of actions at the country level through the ACC machinery, especially CCPOQ.

12. However, one area where progress is manifestly lacking concerns the multiplicity of discordant and overlapping policy and programming frameworks employed by the development partners to formulate their global, regional and country-level strategies and programmes of action and to allocate resources to the priority development problems identified in such frameworks. Each framework is the institutional expression of the organization or donor concerned, reflecting the specificity of its statutory mandate, set of priorities, operational policies and procedures and overall management culture, as well as the accountability requirements of its governing body. Viewed solely from this angle, it would seem unreasonable to dispute the need for each external development partner to have its own policy or programming instrument for development cooperation.

13. Although each framework appears rational from the perspective of each organization's or donor's headquarters, the reverse holds true from the perspective of the host countries where the plurality of frameworks and their formulation, implementation and periodic evaluation requirements invariably tend to overwhelm the weak development coordination and management capacities of the developing countries. More often than not, the "jungle" of frameworks has yielded counterproductive results: overstretching host Governments' institutional capacities and scarce matching resources, or saturation of their "absorptive capacities" even though many national development programmes may remain critically short of funds.

14. Thus, while each framework carries with it the possibility of additional resources, the aggregate total of the resources represented by the numerous frameworks at the country level becomes practically impossible for the recipient Government to plan and manage rationally and productively. This is so not only because of the sheer plurality of the frameworks, but also, and perhaps more serious still, because each framework is different in its priorities and requirements for formulation, implementation, monitoring, and accountability. Such differences exist even within the same organization applying more than one framework in the same country, such as UNDP or WHO. The magnitude of the problem is illustrated by a 1991 report by the UNDP Central Evaluation Office[8], which identified no less than 123 different external development partners in Ethiopia, with the implication that this country, an LDC, had to cope with 123 external development frameworks.

15. It is thus difficult to imagine how any Government however well equipped can efficiently accommodate such a flood of demands and pressures on its institutional capacities. To its credit, UNDP, for instance, has financed over the past decade or so a number of capacity-building projects designed to strengthen host Governments' aid coordination mechanisms in some LDCs and other countries, but as will be seen in the next chapter, these projects have not eliminated the fundamental problem of over-tasked development coordination agencies in the host countries.

16. Also worth underlining is the rapidly expanding role of international NGOs. A 1993 JIU report[9] on this group of partners revealed that some 4,000 development NGOs were officially registered with

OECD member countries, and channelled more resources to the developing countries than the United Nations system (excluding the Bretton Woods institutions). A typical LDC may have as many as 100 NGOs active on its territory. However, the highly flexible and practical modes of intervention of the NGOs and their direct engagement with grassroots communities imply that they do not place unduly excessive demands on host Governments' coordination institutions. Yet other actors such as private sector investors require the attention of host Governemnts for the approval of investment projects.

17. The situation described in the foregoing paragraphs gives rise to a number of concerns. The first relates to the mass of data and documentation constantly and duplicatively required from recipient Government institutions for development needs assessment exercises and the formulation of the numerous cooperation frameworks, as well as the span of attention and resources that must be devoted to their periodic reviews. As a consequence, many recipient country Governments may allocate more of their time and scarce manpower to meeting the requirements of externally-driven development frameworks than to devising and managing endogenous development programmes and mobilizing domestic resources to finance such programmes. Thus, the plurality of frameworks may have the negative, if unintended, effect of smothering sustainable home-grown development initiatives and self-reliant programmes.

18. The second major issue has to do with the ever increasing pressures on many Governments in the developing countries to reduce the cost and size of their public administrations. These downsizing pressures, which often must be complied with as a condition for debt rescheduling schemes and for provision of fresh resources for development financing, generally tend to run at cross purposes with the magnitude of requirements imposed on the same public administrations by external policy and programming frameworks. The general trend to streamline Government institutions, if not pursued carefully, may well lead to a further weakening of local capacities to cope with the vast demands of international development cooperation.

19. A third issue concerns the cost benefits of the organizations' development frameworks. Although the frameworks may, (and do have the potential to) generate additional resources for the recipient countries, it does not appear that this is always the case. For example, a 1992 JIU report evaluating the UNDP-supported Round Table process[10] concluded that while a single such exercise could cost as much as US$ 700,000, its actual benefits in terms of additional aid flows to the country concerned could not be measured either because aid flows are affected by forces outside the control of this programming mechanism, or because the use of it did not by itself commit the donor community to provide additional aid.

20. If the usefulness of the organizations' frameworks is evaluated in terms of the volume and pattern of resources flowing through the United Nations system channels to the developing countries in the past five years for example, the conclusion would be that these frameworks have not all been hugely successful as instruments for resource mobilization. As such, the frameworks, when assessed collectively, appear more as routine bureaucratic exercises than as creative institutions for coordinating and galvanizing development resources locally and externally, and for constantly improving the overall quality and impact of development cooperation.

21. The fourth question concerns the ownership of the frameworks. Although the recipient Governments often participate with widely varying degrees of involvement in their preparation and approval, both in the countries and in the governing bodies of the organizations, the frameworks generally belong to and are managed directly by the organizations and not the host countries. That equally applies to the resources and projects delivered through the frameworks. Ideally, the frameworks should be based on national development plans and programmes; but that is very rarely the case for most organizations whose activities are programmed and implemented in accordance with their specific operational policies and procedures, as required by their executive management and governing bodies, rather than by the recipient Government.

22. The question, therefore, is how the recipient Government can realistically coordinate frameworks which it does not manage or over which it exercises precious little control, particularly in terms of resource allocation decisions. Since the recipient Government cannot reprogramme resources from one framework to another or to underfunded national development programmes, the multiplicity of the frameworks thus creates serious obstacles to the balanced deployment among all development sectors of resources available locally and externally. The Inspector recognizes, however, that the problems analysed in this chapter are not similarly applicable to all recipient countries and that both host and donor Governments have decisive roles to play in bringing about enhanced integration and coherence in development cooperation processes in each country. The following chapter addresses this dimension of the problem.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES OF GOVERNMENTS

A. Host Governments

1. Coordination capacities and constraints

23. General Assembly resolutions on operational activities for development have consistently stressed the point that recipient Governments have primary responsibility for the coordination of all external inputs supportive of their national development programmes. Indeed, the capacity of recipient Governments to exercise fully their coordination prerogatives is crucial to the efficient allocation and management of external resource flows through the many frameworks discussed above.

24. However, any discussion of the challenge involved in the coordination of these frameworks inevitably implies an assessment of development management capabilities in the recipient countries. This is so because coordination is primarily and essentially a managerial task spanning the entire programme and project management cycle, from initial consultations, preparatory meetings and design stages to impact evaluation. In this sense development coordination is not only a continuous process but also calls for a broad range of professional skills needed at the different stages of the cycle.

25. In the course of his field visits for this report, the Inspector found that the main determinant of success in the coordination of external inputs was the political commitment and managerial capacity of the recipient Governments to guide their overall national development process towards clear-sighted and long-term goals, incorporating both domestic and external resources. The main other contributory factors to such success included a conducive socio-economic environment, stability of Government institutions and key managerial personnel, existence of national development plans and strategies, and of effective central mechanisms to oversee and coordinate their implementation on a consistent basis.

26. However, Governments equipped with the necessary development management capabilities may sometimes prefer to pick and deal with individual donors in isolation rather than face possible pressures for hard internal policy reforms advocated by a coordinated front of donors. Thus the lack of coordination within the donor community in some countries may stem from a deliberate policy by the recipient Governments concerned not to encourage it in order to preclude the strictures of conditionalities.

27. Further still, the relatively small volume of official development aid compared with domestic resources and foreign direct investment flows may be considered by the Government concerned as not worth the burden of donor coordination. In other words, whether official development assistance frameworks are coordinated or not has virtually little impact on the national development process. In such circumstances usually found in the relatively large and advanced developing countries, the Inspector found, in fact, no serious problems of coordination for the host Governments, or for the United Nations system and other donors.

28. Major aid coordination problems appear to be concentrated largely, although not exclusively, in those countries where external aid flows represent a substantial percentage of development budgets. All the LDCs are to be found in this group of countries. The paradox is that policy and programming frameworks proliferate in those countries where development management and coordination capabilities are generally in short supply. Instability in Government institutions, including frequent turnover of essential technical staff, uncompetitive Government salaries, inconsistent implementation of national development policies and plans, and a generally demotivating institutional context, have been identified to be among the negative factors inhibiting effective coordination and management of both domestic and external inputs.

2. Strengthening the national fabric for development

29. In general, the same institutional and managerial weaknesses that constrain central Government coordination of its technical departments, or hinder optimal husbandry of domestic factors of development, equally obstruct efficient coordination and internalization of external inputs. Aid coordination problems in these countries usually mirror a more fundamental challenge of strategic leadership and organized capacity to tackle the major constraints on economic growth and social development, which are generally well documented within the United Nations system and therefore need no further elaboration in this report.

30. The prospects are that the political and economic reforms and conflict prevention initiatives underway in many of these countries, if and when consolidated, should also create the indispensable environment for efficient utilization, coordination and accountability for both domestic and external development resources. A similarly encouraging trend within the United Nations system is the increasing attention being devoted to this basic problem of governance and institutional fabric for development. UNDP in particular, among others, seems to have gained in recent years a sharper awareness of the root causes of the problem and is adjusting its strategies and priorities accordingly But there is room for more coordinated efforts in this direction, especially in the light of the Secretary-General's recommendations in "Agenda for Peace" and "An Agenda for Development" focusing attention on five interlinked fundamentals for any long-term and sustainable development: peace, the economy, the environment, society and democracy.

31. Development management constraints are especially illustrated and further compounded by sparse national development statistics on which both Government and external development partners must rely for the formulation of development plans and external cooperation frameworks. Although development data may exist in the technical departments of Government, such data may not always be up-to-date or thoroughly reliable, and centralized development management information systems may either be non-existent or not adequately equipped to process efficiently the numerous information requests addressed to Government. It goes without saying that the existence of efficient national statistical services operating as Government focal points for all development information would reduce workload pressures placed on Government's substantive services by external development partners in their needs assessment and programming exercises.

3. Decentralization to local Government level

32. The Inspector's field findings leave no doubt that a decentralized approach to national development endeavours offers an important part of the necessary durable solution to the acute problem of weak development management and coordination at central Government level. Such an approach should certainly help relieve administrative bottlenecks created in the planning and line ministries by the numerous development frameworks discussed above, while enabling external development partners to use decentralization as a reliable and cost-effective vehicle for channelling resources directly to the intended beneficiary communities. The Inspector found in some countries visited that decentralization to the local Government level significantly reinforced coordinated inter-agency actions at the grassroots in support of poverty alleviation programmes, stimulating rural development as well as food production and security, and boosting entrepreneurship at community level.

33. Support by the United Nations system and the donor community for national decentralization policies and processes, especially in the LDCs, implies reinforcing the operational capabilities of local Government units and community organizations to develop, plan and implement projects and manage resources efficiently. It also implies support for the development of self-sustaining income-generating businesses and activities at the district level. That in turn requires adequate national transport and communications networks to maximize the benefits of a decentralized development strategy, as well

as adequate material resources and trained technical and administrative personnel at decentralized Government level.

34. The Inspector believes that **host Governments should be encouraged to continue to develop and apply a comprehensive policy of decentralization of development management and performance accountability to local Government level. In their support of such decentralization efforts, the United Nations system and other donors should evolve in each country concerned a long-term strategy consisting of the following components, among others:**

(a) Strong and sustained advocacy for the improvement and regular maintenance of nation-wide transport and communications infrastructures, including the allocation of a substantial portion of external aid flows to leverage domestic and foreign investments in this crucial area;

(b) Subject to agreement by the Governments concerned, provision of technical assistance directly to local Government units and self-help community organizations in order to strengthen their capacities to develop, plan, execute, manage, and evaluate projects and programmes in a cost-effective manner;

(c) Encouraging host Governments to consider establishing, where non-existent, project management training facilities specifically designed to provide various forms and levels of training and retraining to Government personnel at central and local levels (including all development sectors) in the design, planning, execution, management, and evaluation of projects and programmes with emphasis on standards of performance efficiency and financial accountability, and to private-sector operators in enterprise development and management.

B. Donor Governments

35. The policies and practices of the major donor Governments also bear significantly on development coordination at the field and headquarters levels. Members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), who are the main purveyors of official development assistance flowing to the developing countries through different channels of international development cooperation, have a major role to play in ensuring that their development aid policies are consistent from one international forum to another in support of development plans and priorities of the host countries, and that their bilateral endeavours are fully supportive of the policies and programmes they advocate in the multilateral organizations.

36. While aid coordination at the country level has received much emphasis on the part of the donor community and in relevant General Assembly resolutions, the need to coordinate donor policies and strategies at the global level has been given lesser documented emphasis to date, although the global conferences of the recent past have certainly contributed significantly to policy harmonization in a number of critical development areas, such as environmental protection, population issues, poverty alleviation and social development, gender issues, etc. These global themes and the new realities following the end of the cold war are expected to accelerate progress towards development policy convergence among the major bilateral and multilateral partners.

37. In reality, however, there can be no doubt that aid coordination problems still abound and further progress is required in the harmonization of donor policies and practices. In this regard, the following factors that limit donor coordination were enumerated by a 1992 JIU report[11]:

- Donors resist serious cooperation and coordination because it hampers their freedom to pursue their own interests, can produce serious policy conflicts, and can demand a great deal of administrative time and expense;

- Many donors call rhetorically for co-ordination, but do not really mean it, since they believe that their programmes are effective but others are not;

- Donors do have significant differences in development philosophy, commercial interests, and bureaucratic approaches, all of which hamper or discourage cooperation;

- Coordination requires discipline, but the critical question is who is to impose it on whom;

- Harmonization of aid procedures is an old and very difficult problem, because donors have different public accountability requirements firmly established by national or governing body directives;

- There has been little practical thinking about how to develop data requirements and decision support systems for effective aid coordination within limited time and staff resources;

- Senior managers in aid organizations too often concentrate on "delivering" their aid allocations and give cooperation and coordination a low priority.

38. Partly for the above reasons each bilateral donor has its specific framework of priorities generally more responsive to their own policy and national interests than to the development priorities of the recipient Governments. The latter have practically little or no influence over the setting of bilateral aid policies and priorities. Operational coordination of the different donor priority frameworks thus becomes exceedingly difficult if not impossible as the recipient Governments can hardly influence resource allocation decisions, patterns, and even timing.

39. One of the main objectives of the UNDP-sponsored Round Table Conferences associating some LDCs with potential donors is to facilitate the coordination of donor interventions in priority areas identified and agreed by the recipient and donor Governments. But the conferences organized to date seem to have fallen well short of that objective, as indicated in paragraph 19. At any rate, the Round Table mechanism does not bind any donor to coordinate its assistance with other donors, nor does it generally affect donor aid priorities and conditionalities.

40. The World Bank-sponsored Consultative Group meetings for the LDCs are also supposed to serve the purpose of promoting policy dialogue and consultations between the recipient and donor Governments, especially in the context of macro-economic reforms. Like the UNDP-supported Round Table mechanism, however, the Consultative Group process is also an externally-driven aid coordination initiative which, while definitely useful, does not appear to be fully internalized within the recipient Governments' overall development management mechanisms.

41. Divergent policies and prescriptions of major donors can create serious coordination bottlenecks in LDCs where bilateral aid alone may account for 50 per cent or more of total external aid flows. One review of aid coordination and effectiveness in the LDCs[12] observed that:

"The very intensity and weight of donor-led coordination in support of donor-driven policy frameworks and programmes have tended to diminish the central role and in some cases actually weakened, the capabilities of LDC Governments in their coordination and management of aid resources. It is now timely to correct this imbalance and to redirect coordination and assistance in ways that build LDC capabilities to manage the totality of resources available to them more effectively, thereby putting them in a position to exercise their primary responsibility for aid coordination as part of national policy-making and development planning."

42. There is indeed room for more progress in the development of comprehensive and coherent donor support strategies that ensure that their discrete sectoral policies of cooperation with the developing countries are mutually supportive of each other, especially in ODA flows, debt, trade,

democracy and human rights, arms sales, etc. For example, donor support for macro-economic reforms in the developing countries could be undercut by inadequate or untimely ODA flows or debt treatment for the reforming countries. One area where there seems to be a need for a high degree of donor policy coordination is support for democratisation and the building of national capacities of governance and development management already discussed in the preceding section.

43. The Inspector believes that **donor aid policies should be coordinated around the development priorities of the recipient countries in general, and more particularly, around the fundamental long-term goal of building up the development self-reliance of the recipient countries, especially the LDCs, by using ODA allocations, for example, to:**

(a) Support south-south economic cooperation schemes;

(b) Promote and finance long-term twinning arrangements between public, parapublic and private institutions in the developing countries and similar institutions in the donor countries with the objective of transferring managerial skills and technology;

(c) Leverage investments from donor countries to the recipient countries, including north-south joint ventures.

IV. THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

44. The General Assembly in its recent resolutions has repeatedly emphasized that ... "the separate funds, programmes and specialized agencies must make a commitment to work together to integrate assistance provided by the United Nations system ... in a fully coordinated manner" (Res. 47/199, para. 38(a)) and stressed "the need for the United Nations system ... to give serious consideration to ways of ensuring a more coherent response by the System ..." (Res. 50/120, para. 14). In addition , some important decisions[13] have been taken by the General Assembly relating to coordination among the United Nations agencies at the country level, in particular through more effective functioning of the resident coordinator system.

45. In this chapter the Inspector assesses the extent to which the United Nations system is operating in conformity with these legislative directives. In so doing, he reviews the main tools used for the coordination of development policies and programmes within the United Nations system. Each tool is assessed in terms of its existing and potential contribution to eliminating overlapping efforts among the organizations and heightening efficiency and effectiveness in resource allocations and programme management.

A. The Resident Coordinator System

46. Since the establishment in 1978 of resident coordinators of the operational activities of the United Nations system at the country level, relevant General Assembly resolutions (see paragraph 4 above) have assigned to this office a central role in supporting host Governments to achieve effective coordination and integration of the programmes of the organizations in the field. Conversely, the host Government, including all its relevant departments, is expected to give to the resident coordinator effective and consistent backing to ensure that he/she has the legitimacy and authority to perform the coordination functions assigned by the General Assembly.

47. Further still, the resident coordinator's authority can be enhanced also by his/her demonstrable competence and public relations skills required for the job, as well as by the quality of cooperation extended to the resident coordinator system by all the organizations, both at the field and headquarters levels. Thus the Inspector does not subscribe to the prevailing view that the volume of resources at the command of the resident coordinator can be of itself a decisive factor in the performance of the latter's functions. Nevertheless, appropriate measures may be required to further strengthen the resident coordinator system, such as the recent decision of the UNDP Executive Board to allocate 1.7 per cent of UNDP's resources for that purpose.

1. Field coordination committee

48. As the centrepiece of the organizations' country-level coordination arrangements, the resident coordinators obviously have a key role to play in bringing coherence to the plurality of policy and programming frameworks employed by external development partners. One mechanism recommended by the General Assembly (Res. 47/199) for that purpose is a field-level committee comprising all resident United Nations system representatives on whose effective cooperation depends the success of the resident coordinator system.

49. The Secretary-General's afore-mentioned triennial policy review of operational activities for development indicates that such committees have been established in about 50 recipient countries, while in 20 others regular inter-agency coordination meetings were held for specific exercises even though the establishment of a field-level committee had not been formalized. It would also appear that in about 75 per cent of cases where the committees have been formalized, they were proving useful in ensuring that the organizations' programmes and projects were systematically reviewed for possible complementary financing and coordinated implementation.

50. In the course of his field trips, the Inspector found that while such committees existed indeed in all the countries visited, they differed significantly in their scope, operational modalities and effectiveness. The committees appeared especially useful, if not indispensable, in those countries with substantial involvement of external partners or where host Governments' coordinating capacity appeared weak. In two relatively advanced developing countries, the Governments concerned did not appear to encourage the formalization of such committees.

51. In one LDC with serious coordination problems, the United Nations system coordination committee, which included virtually all bilateral donors, the Bretton Woods institutions and other multilateral financial institutions, as well as host Government officials, was judged by the Inspector to function very effectively for promoting policy dialogue and programme coordination. The Committee met every two months while its more technically focused sectoral subcommittees and thematic working groups met more frequently. These coordination arrangements, which were also being tried at the subnational levels, appeared to guarantee a holistic, multidisciplinary, and coherent donor approach to the critical development issues of the country concerned. Although the leadership role of the host Government in the operation of these donor coordination arrangements did not seem obvious, the Inspector believes that the arrangements were the only viable means available for meshing to the extent possible the different development frameworks of the system and donor community (see Recommendation 5).

2. Development cooperation report

52. The resident coordinators are required to publish each year a "development cooperation report" on their respective countries of assignment. The reports, which use a standard format, provide general information and indicators on a recipient country's economic, social and political situation, followed by a detailed inventory of external assistance commitments, disbursements and activities by organization and donor, sector, subsector or development theme. The reliability and completeness of information contained in the reports depend entirely on the quality of data collected through questionnaires. Each report is the only publication of its kind providing an overall view of the scope, priorities and trends of external aid flows into the country concerned in a given year.

53. Although the reports are compiled essentially for the information purposes of the development partners, their value for the planning and coordination of development assistance inflows could certainly be enhanced if they provided indications of future commitments by the host Government and external partners, by sector, subsector or development theme, over a two-year time frame for example. Further, the development cooperation report could also be used to monitor annual progress in the implementation of the CSN in countries which have adopted this coordination mechanism which is reviewed further below (Recommendation 1(f)).

3. Development information facility (data bank)

54. The development cooperation report is prepared using a UNDP database (Development Cooperation Analysis System (DCAS) which could form the nucleus of a more comprehensive development information bank covering all development spheres of the country concerned and managed by the resident coordinator's office. Because effective coordination processes depend a great deal on the availability, reliability and sound management of development information, the Inspector recommends that part of the resources earmarked by the UNDP Executive Board for strengthening the resident coordinator system should be used to upgrade or establish a central facility for the systematic collection, updating and validation of development information
in each country, with the participation in that process of all the organizations in their respective areas of competence.

55. Such an information facility or data bank should be fully equipped and efficiently managed to provide all the types of development information and data needed by external development partners

for the formulation of their policy and programming frameworks. It should also be linked as appropriate to the regional structures and headquarters of all organizations of the system through the electronic media, especially the internet where possible. This would imply that all development information requests emanating from the international community, both locally and externally, would be addressed to the resident coordinator's office for processing. This dispensation would formalize the resident coordinator's focal point role as development information manager for the entire system and donor community (Recommendation 4).

B. The Country Strategy Note

56. The country strategy note (CSN) constitutes the core of the present report. The CSN was established by the General Assembly (resolution 47/199, paragraph 9) as a system-wide programming mechanism for use by the recipient countries on the basis of their priorities and plans "to ensure the effective integration of assistance provided by the United Nations system into the development process of countries, with enhanced accountability, and to facilitate the assessment and evaluation of the impact and sustainability of that assistance."

57. Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 50/120, in paragraph 18, stipulates that, "where in place, the country strategy note should be the common framework for country programmes of United Nations system organizations and for programming, monitoring, and evaluating United Nations system activities in such countries, and that the country strategy note should outline the United Nations system contribution, including, where appropriate, an indication of the level of resources needed to meet the requirements therein".

1. ACC basic principles and guidance elements

58. In compliance with the foregoing Assembly directives, ACC has accomplished the valuable task of elaborating detailed operational parameters for the CSN. For example, it has established the following useful basic principles[14], which the Inspector fully endorses:

(a) The CSN should be a mechanism for collaborative mobilization of resources by the system organizations for the recipient countries;

(b) It should reflect national, regional and global priorities;

(c) It should focus on those key development areas where the United Nations system support can make a distinct difference in the light of its comparative advantage, and should encompass both policy advice and substantive and management services;

(d) It should establish strong links with relevant regional and global activities of the system;

(e) It should be based, inter alia, on interaction with other programming exercises such as the formulation of Policy Framework Papers, Structural or Sectoral Adjustment Programmes, Public Investment and Public Expenditure Programmes, in order to ensure that Governments have a broad range of policy advice;

(f) It should facilitate a more effective participation by the United Nations system in donor-wide groups such as Consultative Groups and Roundtables, and also help mobilize a wide range of donors behind key Government priorities;

(g) It should help establish a process for reviewing and evaluating the degree to which United Nations system assistance is actually supporting progress towards national and global development objectives and targets, and should facilitate the shift to a programme approach.

59. However, the ACC principles which the Inspector believes should be further clarified to ensure that they do not defeat the basic purpose of the CSN are:

(a) The CSN shall not substitute for the programme preparation frameworks of individual organizations;

(b) Each organization must remain accountable for the use of its funds in accordance with its mandates and procedures and through the established direct links with its Governments counterparts;

(c) It is the responsibility of each organization to ensure that its analytical and operational projects and programmes are supportive and consistent with the overall CSN;

(d) The CSN should be fully taken into account by the United Nations system field representatives when carrying out major programming exercises.

60. In line with the established principle that United Nations system programmes and activities should fall squarely under the ownership of the recipient Governments which should be enabled to plan, manage and coordinate such programmes and activities in accordance with their priorities, the Inspector takes the view that it should be the responsibility of the recipient Governments concerned, and not that of the organizations, to decide on the most appropriate courses of action in respect of the four points outlined in paragraph 59 above.

61. For example, a recipient Government may well decide to dispense with other "major programming exercises" of the organizations because such exercises would duplicate or overlap with the CSN process and perhaps document. The Government may also decide that the accountability requirements of individual organizations not be discharged piece-meal and at different stages of their convenience but rather in the context of a common standard format that might best suit the Government since it would harmonize and synchronize the main accountability and reporting procedures and stages for all the organizations. Further still, it is the responsibility of the recipient Government to ensure that the analytical and operational projects and programmes of the organizations are supportive and consistent with the CSN.

62. The Inspector believes that the above precisions regarding the respective responsibilities and roles of the recipient Governments and the organizations should be borne in mind at all times in order to reinforce the basic objective of the CSN, which is to guarantee Government ownership of United Nations system-supported programmes and activities and their coherent integration with the overall national development process. The principle of Government ownership is, however, stressed in further ACC "Guidance Elements for the Preparation, Design, and Implementation of the Country strategy Note".

2. Review of two Country Strategy Notes

63. To evaluate the extent to which both the ACC principles and guidance elements are being translated into operational expression, the Inspector reviewed two CSN documents prepared in 1995. The two CSNs portray the significant differences in the operational contexts of the two countries concerned. One CSN concerning an advanced developing country with limited United Nations system involvement provides only the broad outlines of national priorities and supportive actions by external development partners. The CSN has a five-year time frame and expects the system organizations to concentrate on supporting implementation of the recommendations of global conferences. No data are provided on current and future external assistance. Provision is made for coordination and annual review of implementation actions.

64. The other CSN for a low-income developing country with significant involvement of the system organizations and donors is considerably more detailed and precise in relating international development cooperation to the national development strategy. It provides data on current external assistance flows from all sources but attempts no projections for future years in support of the CSN implementation. No time frame is specified, and no information is given on host Government's resource outlays or financing means and sources to be complemented by external assistance for CSN implementation. Arrangements for inter-agency collaboration and coordination in support of the CSN centre on thematic subgroups, with several agencies participating in each subgroup depending on the relation of the subject area to their specializations and mandates.

65. As stated in the same CSN, each subgroup is to prepare a detailed programme outline with sets of objectively verifiable indicators for monitoring the implementation process. The detailed programme outlines are to guide the agencies in the preparation or refocusing of their country programmes and in resource mobilisation. The CSN requires the resident coordinator to review each approved country programme to ascertain the linkages with other country programmes with a view to emphasizing an integrated programme approach and ensuring that each country programme fits into the CSN. Provision is made for annual implementation reviews by each subgroup, and for a permanent monitoring mechanism involving all external development partners, chaired by the Minister of Finance.

66. However, CSN implementation and coordination arrangements do not sufficiently bring out possible complementary roles and actions among the three main groups of external development partners, viz the system development organizations, the multilateral financial institutions and bilateral donors, considering especially that in the country covered by the CSN under review, the financial institutions and bilateral donors account for 90 per cent of total aid flows into the country. Consequently, the potential value of the CSN could be limited if it cannot be used by the host Government as the main tool for integrating all external inputs into its national development agenda. Further, the CSN's linkages with regional programmes and strategies are rather weak, and implementation of the commitments flowing from global conferences is not adequately covered.

3. Major findings

67. The overall findings of this report regarding the CSN can be summarized as follows:

(a) The ACC basic principles regarding the CSN would need to be modified in order to underscore host Governments' ownership and policy responsibility for all programmes supported by the organizations, as outlined above;

(b) The guidance elements for the preparation, design and implementation of the CSN constitute a fairly sound and comprehensive basis for coordinated inter-agency actions in support of the process. However, because these guidance elements are rather recent (1994), they do not appear to have been followed fully in the preparation of the CSNs analyzed in the foregoing paragraphs. Due attention should be given to subregional and regional dimensions that could reinforce the impact of national programmes contained in the CSN. In this regard the role of the regional economic commissions would seem indispensable;

(c) In the identification of programmes to be included in the CSN, priority consideration should be given to existing national programmes that could be refocused and/or strengthened with the integrated support of external partners in the CSN implementation process;

(d) The CSN is especially relevant in countries with significant involvement of the United Nations system and other major donors, and its potential value as a coordination mechanism would be limited if it does not cover all external inputs;

(e) The CSN should not be seen simply as one additional programming framework but rather as the common framework for country programmes of United Nations system organizations as stipulated in paragraph 18 of General Assembly resolution 50/120;

(f) Its usefulness is likely to be diminished if it co-exists with other major programming exercises, especially of a multisectoral nature, of the United Nations system, or if it does not significantly reduce the frequency, costs and workloads entailed in the development of the country programmes of the organizations;

(g) It would be useful to indicate the estimated financial resources and funding sources required to implement the CSN programmes, including both domestic and external resources;

(h) In countries with significant structural adjustment programmes financed by the multilateral financial institutions in the context of their Policy Framework Papers (PFP), the CSN could either be dispensed with, or any new CSN process could be designed to support the efficient implementation of such programmes to enhance the prospects of their success and impact. In that event, the CSN could dovetail with and have the same time frame as the PFP.

(i) The programme approach, as elaborated by ACC,[15] seems to be the only viable modality for inter-agency collaboration in the formulation and implementation of the CSN. However, some conditions still need to be fulfilled to achieve the basic objective of this approach;

- Firstly, system-wide standard formats are required for data collection, situation analysis or development needs assessments, reporting cycles and procedures, as well as evaluation and accountability requirements. The proposed standard formats should be shared with other major donors who should be encouraged to use them to facilitate joint programming and operational coordination among all external partners in support of national programmes;

- Secondly, efforts should be continued to simplify and harmonize programme cycles and rules in keeping with relevant General Assembly directives;

- Thirdly, the sharing or development of common programme support services at the country level has been found by the Inspector to facilitate and promote integrated approaches to substantive programme development and implementation;

- Fourthly, the recipient Governments could be assisted by the resident coordinators in ensuring that all the partners with significant resource commitments operate effectively and uniformly in accordance with the CSN and programme approach guidelines;

- Finally, the active and sustained support of the organizations' respective headquarters appears indispensable to the success of field-level coordination arrangements. The Inspector's field findings suggest that such support is currently very uneven among the organizations, and that relevant General Assembly directives as well as CCPOQ guidelines are not consistently observed by all field representatives. Even though this problem arises partly from the personality traits of individual representatives, it could be mitigated by using a standard set of instructions by all the organizations' executive heads to their field representatives regarding programme and operational coordination questions at the country level.

C. Regional and Subregional Coordination Frameworks

68. General Assembly resolution 50/120 on the triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States and United Nations organizations, to consider ways of enhancing the coordination of United Nations development activities at the regional and subregional levels, including ways of enhancing the role of the regional commissions and of promoting the national ownership of regional programmes. This directive is in line with paragraph 20 of the Annex to the 1977 General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, which stipulated inter alia that the regional commissions should exercise "team leadership and responsibility for coordination and cooperation at the regional level."

69. Depending on the development situation specific to their respective regions, the regional commissions have adopted regional coordination and cooperation frameworks in their areas of competence. For example, ESCAP has adopted several such frameworks in the past five years, including the Seoul Plan of Action for Promoting Industrial Restructuring in Asia and the Pacific, the Tehran Declaration on Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Technology-led Industrialization in Asia and the Pacific, or the Programme for Regional Economic Cooperation in Investment-related Technology Transfer.

70. ESCWA promotes regional coordination and cooperation on thematic issues, such as water resources, inter alia through the frameworks established by the intergovernmental organizations within its region, including in particular the specialized agencies of the Arab League.

71. The General Assembly has established a programme framework for the African region, namely the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), which has received extensive review in a separate JIU report.[16] Having analysed the numerous regional policy and programme frameworks prevailing in Africa as well as the coordination roles of ECA and other African intergovernmental organizations, especially the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the JIU report recommended the establishment of a regional mechanism comprising the ECA, other African regional organizations and major external partners with a view to harmonizing all regional development policies, strategies and programmes adopted within and outside of Africa.

72. In the European region, ECE cooperates closely with several subregional intergovernmental groupings such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Central European Initiative (CEI), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Council of Baltic Ministers.

73. In Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC has maintained and strengthened over the years its working relations with other United Nations organizations with a view to enhancing coordination of development cooperation policy and programming frameworks at the regional and subregional levels. The commission has also established subsidiary bodies for cooperation and coordination at the subregional level, such as the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) and the Central American Economic Cooperation Committee (CAECC), which act as coordination bodies for activities relating to development and intercountry cooperation in their respective subregions. Furthermore, ECLAC has continued, as mandated by relevant General Assembly resolutions, to broaden and deepen its coordination and mutual support activities with the Latin American Economic System (SELA) at the regional level, whose objective is to promote regional cooperation aimed at self-sustained, independent and integral development.

74. In addition to the multisectoral regional coordination frameworks and institutions supported by the regional commissions in their respective regions, other organizations of the United Nations system also have regional frameworks in their sectors of competence. Programme coordination arrangements involving the regional commissions and other members of the system vary considerably from one region

to another as well as among subject areas. With few exceptions, the regional and subregional structures of the organizations do not have the same territorial jurisdictions, and are not co-located with the regional commissions' secretariats, as required by the Relationship Agreements between the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies, and reiterated by the Assembly in resolution 32/197.

75. Furthermore, the regional commissions should be the main development forum for reviewing and interconnecting the different sectoral and cross-sectoral regional programmes of the organizations, in draft form, prior to approval by the governing bodies. A noteworthy phenomenon is that regional and subregional economic cooperation and integration groupings are increasing and gaining force in virtually all regions as the principal mechanisms for development coordination. For instance, a recent UNCTAD publication on the state of South-South cooperation[17] lists about 50 such groupings or organizations, almost half of them in the African region alone. With the exception of the regional commissions, the United Nations system is yet to evolve a coherent strategy of cooperation with these groupings or organizations which could provide the best possible context for integrating the organizations' intercountry programme frameworks (see Recommendation 6).

V. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM

76. The fragmentary intergovernmental nature of the United Nations development system is without doubt responsible for the plethora of the development frameworks of the multilateral organizations. Although the rich diversity of expertise represented by the System's many specialized boards, bodies and committees can be considered a source of strength, the integrated, practical application of that diverse expertise in order to produce a critical impact on development problems in the field has proved elusive over the decades for lack of unitary legislative guidance and coordinated programme/ budget formulation and approval processes.

77. Although previous reform endeavours, exemplified by General Assembly resolution 32/197 (1977) on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, fell somewhat short of their objectives, the current restructuring process should significantly strengthen the oversight and coordination functions of the relevant intergovernmental bodies, in particular of the Economic and Social Council in accordance with the relevant Articles of the United Nations Charter. For example, the restructuring and revitalization measures adopted by the General Assembly since 1990, such as in resolutions 45/177, 45/264, 46/235, 48/162 and 50/227, have underscored the overriding importance Member States now assign to system-wide coordination issues, and have endowed ECOSOC with new tools and procedures for the effective performance of its coordination mandate.

78. As rightly observed by the Secretary-General in "An Agenda for Development", the Economic and Social Council should serve as an international development assistance review committee, providing a regular opportunity for both donors and recipients to discuss and assess aid programmes and policies. As part of this role, the Council should function as a unifying governing entity to which the existing governing bodies of the United Nations funds and programmes would relate on major policy matters.[18]

79. The Coordination Segment of ECOSOC periodically selects for discussion coordination themes arising from the subsidiary bodies, principal organs and specialized agencies. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/162, paragraph 22 (i) of Annex I, each Executive Board of the United Nations funds and programmes is required to submit annual reports to the Council at its substantive session, which could include recommendations for improvement of field-level coordination, while paragraph 36 of the same resolution invites the Secretary-General to make recommendations to the Council on enhancing the modalities of reporting to the Council, including the advantages of establishing a system of integrated reports in the economic, social and related fields.

80. By its resolution 1995/51 on overall guidance on operational activities for development to the United Nations funds and programmes, the Council requested these entities to improve coherence in their country programmes, inter alia, by considering the possibility of joint or consecutive meetings of the Executive Boards, where practicable, on country programmes, and by improving the link between their country programmes and the country strategy notes, where in place, bearing in mind the need for cooperation between external donors and the United Nations funds and programmes (paragraph 6). The same resolution requests the United Nations funds and programmes, in the context of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy, to report jointly to the Council through the Secretary-General on questions relating to coordination, cooperation and division of labour, and on other issues they consider appropriate (paragraph 10).

81. In the light of his findings for this report, and in order to encourage the Executive Boards of United Nations programmes and funds to work closely together, the Inspector believes that the option of joint meetings of the Executive Boards for the consideration of CSNs and country programme documents, and that of joint or integrated reports by these entities to the Council would definitely contribute to improving coherent and integrated approaches to development problems, both at the headquarters and field levels. The possibility of joint sessions of the Boards could ultimately be

extended to the specialized agencies under the aegis of the Coordination Segment of the Council, whereby each specialized agency could be represented at such joint sessions by designated members of the governing body bureau.

82. The joint sessions would also afford opportunities for reviewing system-wide compliance with General Assembly resolutions on coordination issues, and for speeding up progress towards the harmonization of programming cycles and operational rules and procedures throughout the system. The Council could also seek out ways of standardizing formats for the preparation and formulation of the organizations' technical cooperation programmes and budgets, which could be reviewed by the Coordination Segment in draft form in order to strengthen cross-organizational linkages and coherence among the programmes and budgets prior to their approval by the respective governing bodies of the system.

83. In line with ECOSOC resolution 1995/51, a review of the practical feasibility of joint or consecutive sessions of the Executive Boards as well as integrated reports through the Secretary-General to the Council, is considered as a step towards improved coordination. In the view of the Inspector, the next step would be to establish an integrated Executive Board functioning as a committee of the Council, while preserving the identity and mandate of each of the organizations concerned (see Recommendation 7).

NOTES

1. The term 'framework' is used in this report to mean a standard institutional format, mechanism or frame of reference used by the organizations and donor community to formulate, implement and evaluate the development cooperation policies, strategies, and activities.

2. Investigation of the Relationship between Humanitarian Assistance and Peace-Keeping Operations (JIU/REP/95/6), and The Involvement of the United Nations System in Providing and Coordinating Humanitarian Assistance (JIU/REP/95/9).

3. General Assembly documents A/48/689 of 29 November 1993; A/48/935 of 6 May 1994 and A/49/665 of 11 November 1994.

4. An Agenda for Development, A report of the Secretary-General, General Assembly Document A/48/935, 6 May 1994, paragraph 213.

5. For example: United Nations System Cooperation with Multilateral Financial Institutions (JIU/REP/92/1); The Revised Round Table Process (JIU/REP/92/4); Decentralization of Organizations within the United Nations System (JIU/REP/92/6); Evaluation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (JIU/REP/95/12).

6. General Assembly document A/50/202 of 7 September 1995.

7. General Assembly resolutions 45/264(1991); 46/235(1992); and 48/162 (1993) and 50/227 (1996).

8. Capacity building for Aid Coordination in the Least Developed Countries, Volume 1, UNDP central evaluation study No. 4/91, May 1991.

9. See JIU report entitled "Working with NGOs: Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System with Non-Governmental Organizations at the Grassroots and National Levels, JIU/REP/93/1, paragraph 36.

10. The Revised Round Table Process, JIU/REP/92/4.

11. United Nations System Cooperation with Multilateral Financial Institutions (JIU/REP/92/1), paragraph 47.

12. Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries: "Aid Coordination and Effectiveness", UNCTAD, UNCLDC 11/4, 8 March 1990.

13. (1) General Assembly resolution 47/199:

"The United Nations system at the country level should be tailored ... to the specific development needs of the country ... rather than to the institutional structure of the United Nations (para. 38(b);

(2) General Assembly resolution 50/120:

(i) The Secretary-General should "urge all members of the United Nations development system to give clear guidance and direction to their country representatives to promote the effective functioning of the resident coordinator system" (para. 37(d);

(ii) "... to promote coordination and a better division of labour resident coordinators should, at an early stage of formulation, be informed of planned programme activities of the United Nations agencies, funds, programmes and bodies" (para. 40);

(iii) "... the field-level committees ... should review substantive activities, including draft country programmes ..., prior to their approval by individual organizations ..." (Para 41);

(iv) "Reaffirms ... the authority of resident coordinators ... to propose ... to the heads of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies, the amendment of country programmes ... in order to bring them into line with country strategy notes" (para 42).

14. See ACC document ACC/1993/10, paragraph 17(a).

15. See for example E/1993/73 Annex III, and the report on Inter-Agency Informal consultations on the Programme Approach and National Execution, Turin Centre, 1994.

16. JIU report entitled "Evaluation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF): Towards a More Operational Approach", JIU/REP/95/12, or A/50/885.

17. "State of South-South Cooperation; Statistical Pocket Book and Index of Cooperation Organizations, UNCTAD, 1995.

18. An Agenda for Development, Report of the Secretary-General, op.cit. Paragraph 45.